



Best Practices for Managing Your Waste Stream

This document is for Virginia state agencies and institutions that are looking to improve their waste stream management. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality has compiled this guidance to assist facilities in starting effective recycling and composting programs, as well as improving waste management programs already in place.

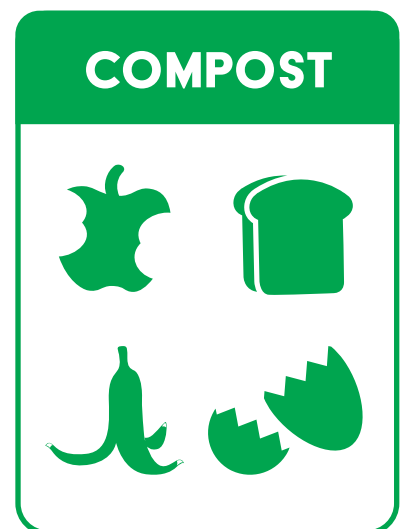
Recycling Bin Placement

- **Location is Key:** Place your bins where waste is generated or close to those locations. Example locations include copy rooms, cafeterias, hallways, vending machine areas and the lobby.
 - Skip the trashcans at individual workspaces. When employees sort waste at a centralized location, they become more aware of what they are tossing instead of it all going in one bin under the desk.
- **Side-by-Side:** Whenever possible, place clearly labeled recycle, compost and trash bins next to each other to reduce contamination. Always place recycling bins next to trash bins, otherwise a recycling bin by itself may become a trash bin and vice versa.
- **Uniform Bins:** If you are purchasing new bins, buy uniform bins in different colors if possible. Royal blue-colored bins are typically associated with recycling and green bins with composting.
 - Avoid using blue or green bins for trash, which could cause confusion.
- **Close the Lid:** If possible, containers should have lids that feature information on the material(s) collected on the lid.
- **Size:** Place kitchen-sized bins in the breakroom, and large bins adjacent to copy machines and printers, or in the lobby.



Signage

- Contamination significantly reduces the value of recyclables, so it is important for people to know what can and cannot go into a bin. Clear up any recycling confusion with signage.
- Eliminate the guesswork and label all bins. Place guidelines for accepted materials on or above all recycling, landfill and compost bins.
 - Check with your recycling and compost vendors to make sure your information is accurate.
- Consider color-coding your waste streams. By assigning a color to each waste stream type, you can improve recycling participation by creating familiarity. Signage should match the waste stream color. Colors vary from business-to-business, but the most common color scheme is:
 - **Blue** – Comingled recyclables
 - **Green** – Composting
 - **Black** – Landfill
- Ensure the signage is visible.
 - Place signs at eye-level.
 - Make signs large and easy to read.
- Include examples and pictures.
 - Examples of commonly used items for each stream will help encourage correct sorting.
 - Images of commonly generated materials also makes sorting easier.
- List what isn't allowed in the waste stream.
 - Reduce contamination by listing non-recyclable items, like plastic bags, used napkins and paper towels, polystyrene, etc.
- Be consistent. Signage should look the same at each recycling station.
- Create matching signage in other languages as needed to ensure your message is understood.



Communication is Key

- Promotion and education are critical for awareness and a successful recycling program. Participation is higher when people feel well-informed about the program and its benefits.
 - Email staff when there are changes to the program or when contamination is high, and remind people what should and should not go in the bins.
- Emails can cover more than just recycling. Remind people to opt for reusable items when possible and encourage them to find ways to reduce their waste.
 - Make meetings paperless.
 - Set printers to default to print double-sided.
 - Create an office supply reuse station.
- Involve custodial staff.
 - Custodians should report problems to the program coordinator.
 - Work with custodians to decide when a bin needs a new bag and when trash can be consolidated without replacing the bag.
- Be creative to encourage buy-in of the program throughout your facility.

Conduct a Waste Assessment

- Go through your building(s) and look in the trashcans. Estimate the amount of material in the trash that can be recycled and vice versa. Note areas that generate large amounts of recyclables.
- Monitor your trash and recycle dumpsters for a few weeks to gauge service needs.
- Don't use plastic bags for recyclables. Recyclable materials should be placed loosely in the dumpsters without plastic bags in order to be processed by the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). Bags that get in the equipment at the MRF can cause the machinery to jam and cause a shutdown to remove the bags.
- For more information on conducting a waste audit, see the Five Steps to a Waste Audit in the [Best Management Practices](#) on the DEQ website.

